

Sermon for Sunday Jan. 16th, 2022 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5 Ps 36:5-10 1 Cor 12:1-11 John 2:1-11

Today's readings celebrate the hope and joy of our faith, even if they don't seem to at the beginning of the reading.

Isaiah talks about the good news from God, but it begins with a lament about what God hasn't done. Certainly something that a lot of folks can empathize with today. One theologian put it this way "in Isaiah 62, the prophet is addressing a people who have been full of hope but now must battle the deteriorating morale caused by broken dreams and crumbling faith. The people wonder if God is powerless to fulfill the promises made" Isaiah demands that God do something. I am sure that there are a lot of folks out there asking why is God letting this happen? Why is God not fixing this? We tend to think that we are the only people that have faced trials such as this. We forget that our ancestors just in the last 120 yrs faced a Spanish flu epidemic that killed 50 million people; WWI that killed 50 million; WWII that killed 60 million; the holocaust, Korean & Vietnam wars as well as a great depression. Today we have lost 5.5 million people world wide to covid, a significant and heart wrenching loss but not up to the toll of the past 100 yrs. Today we complain because we are stuck at home with heating & air conditioning; wifi; phones; tv. We complain that we have to wear masks and get vaccinations that will protect us from the serious affects of covid. When looking at what our ancestors have faced in the past we really don't have a lot to complain about.

For some folks noting that God hasn't done what was promised, at least in our eyes, isn't what we should be doing. That getting angry with God is not something that we should do. Yet by withholding a very valid emotion from God we aren't showing God our reality, we aren't showing God who we are. Notice I said we aren't showing. It is not that God doesn't know is it? It is because we only want to appear at our best to God, yet by doing that we forget that God knows all about us. God sent Jesus the son because God knew that we weren't perfect, that we sin and that we need a way to make that relationship with God right again. God can face the reality of who we are and how we feel. One theologian said "Isaiah 62 also gives us a model for honest prayer when life is difficult and God seems distant, if not indifferent. We dare to emulate Isaiah's lament and bold protest because those are elements of the prayers of God's people just as much as words of thanksgiving and praise....To withhold parts of life from that conversation is in fact to withhold part of life from God."

For most of us we would go through this emotion of worry, anger and feeling abandoned by God and eventually come to know that God is still there for us and still loves us. Isaiah expresses the good news of faith by a change of name and therefore relationship with Israel. At the beginning of this section Isaiah calls Israel forsaken, by the end Isaiah is calling Israel "My delight in in her" by reflecting on the relationship as one similar to marriage. Just as in marriage the relationship that God has with us, and us with God, is one based on love. A sentiment that the psalmist reinforces in the last verse of today's psalm "O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!"

How has your relationship with God changed over the past 2 years of facing something that is upsetting, disappointing and fearful? Has it strengthened your faith? Made you question it? Made you rely on God and the joy and hope found in faith even more strongly?

Someone said that it is not what you face in life that makes you who you are it is how you react to it. We all bemoan things in our life, it's human nature, but if we stay in that place it isn't good. We need to remember as Paul told the church in Corinth, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. To have faith is to hold onto the hope that it brings to both us and the world. I know for most of us it is our faith in God that will see us through these times of stress and worry and fear, and help us to move forward to the next time when we are faced with it again. I pray that we get the opportunity to celebrate in between but it would be unrealistic to think that we won't have more problems to face in our lives.

God has something special waiting for us and we simply have to hold on until we can reach out and grasp it. Life is never all mountain top experiences, but it can be rainbow ones each and every day. God can surprise us just as Jesus did at the wedding in Cana. At an event that was celebrated for 7 days and the best wine served at the beginning of the celebration we hear that Jesus' mom Mary asked him to help out the host because they were running out of wine. This would have been a terrible breach in hospitality and frowned upon hugely by society. Jesus despite objecting changed the water into wine, and not only just wine but wine that was really good. Good enough to have been served at the beginning of the celebration before folks got to inebriated and didn't really care how good it was. That for me is an example of faith at its best and the love that God has for us. Not only that love is offered but even when we don't expect something magnificent that is what we get. It warms our hearts and can't help but cause us to rejoice and celebrate. One theologian commented on how wonderful it was that Jesus started his public ministry by making sure that the celebration that he communion of faith was having could continue.

Jesus did his first miracle at an everyday common event. Perhaps this retelling of this particular miracle stands out so that it can also remind us that God is there in the everyday as well as in the special or desperate times. We need both as individuals and church to know that God is present both in us and for us not just during worship or prayer but walking right beside us at our shoulder to support us and comfort us as needed. Faith can be important in the big times of our lives as well as in the ordinary and mundane and that is definitely something to celebrate.

I pray that the celebration that your faith brings to your life will continue and be as full of joy as possible even during these difficult times. May you know that joy and hope in tough times to bring you hope and in the good times to help you to rejoice. May the church continue to be the family of support and love that God asks it to be and may we all both support it and rely upon it for the love that is there.